

Reply To: 3400

Date: August 18, 1992

To: Ron Bassett, District Ranger, Ojai Ranger District  
Los Padres National Forest

Subject: Oak rot and hazard trees, Oak Flat Station and Blue Point Campground  
(Report No. S92-5)

Dear Ron:

On July 29, 1992, I visited Oak Flat and the Blue Point Campground on the Ojai Ranger District to examine diseased oak trees. Terry Austin requested that these trees be examined by Forest Pest Management because of the extensive heart rot present in many trees and concerns that these trees might present hazards to people and property. I was accompanied by Terry Austin and John Boggs from your district and by Dave Schreiner from the Supervisor's Office, LPNF.

All of the trees examined were coast live oak, Quercus agrifolia Nee. At Oak Flat many of the trees were of large diameter (e.g., 36 inches DBH) and were estimated to be up to 250 years old. A very large branch (approximately 18 inches diameter near the base) had fallen two weeks previously, but had not caused any injuries or property loss. Another large limb fell one year ago and damaged a trailer used as a residence. One tree with stress cracks is leaning over the barracks. Many of the trees, including the two which had failed, have extensive heart rot. In some cases the trunks and main limbs are supported by a cylinder of sound wood that is only a few inches thick. In addition, some of the trees had very thin crowns, suggesting that they were infected with root rot. True mistletoe infection was present in some trees.

Blue Point Campground is located on Piru Creek upstream from Lake Piru. It is a very heavily used campground with 42 campsites. Coast live oak is the dominant tree species with a minor component of other hardwoods. Most of the oaks were of younger age classes than those at Oak Flat, but are suffering from a similar degree of heartrot. For example, one particularly hazardous tree at campsite 41 was approximately 40 inches DBH and was being supported by a four inch cylinder of sound wood which only extended three quarters of the way around the bole. In addition, the trees are suffering from true mistletoe infection, soil compaction, and vandalism, including one tree which had been completely girdled by an ax. No regeneration was seen.

At both sites many limbs and trees were judged to present hazards. To be considered hazardous, (1) there must be potential for the tree to fail, and (2) there must be a target of value which the tree is capable of damaging. The first criterion is often difficult to determine and requires knowledge and experience. Factors which should be considered include mechanical damage to the roots, root rot, heart rot, visible cracks in the bark of the bole or large limbs, splits at the junction of forks, dead limbs with evidence of rot, rot in old branch stubs, and architectural problems such as very large branches growing horizontally and leaning trees.

actions to be taken depend on the management objectives for the sites. Some alternatives are as follows:

1. Do nothing. Limbs and whole trees at both sites will continue to fail. Some property will be damaged, and some injuries or fatalities may occur, particularly at the campground. Regeneration is unlikely to occur at the campground.

2. Move the target/ close the campground. At Oak Flat the District intends to move the trailer damaged by a limb last year. However it would be costly and perhaps impossible to move the barracks, which is a permanent structure.

Because of the high proportion of hazardous trees at the campground, and because of the high amount of public use of the area, it might not be possible to significantly reduce the hazard by simply moving particular campsites. Therefore if a full hazard tree program cannot be implemented there it may be prudent to close the campground until it can be more intensively managed.

3. Implement a hazard tree program. The cost of removing hazardous limbs and trees is far less than the cost of property damage or potential lawsuits from injuries. John Boggs and I carefully examined many trees at both sites. It was clear than he knew which limbs and trees constituted hazards.

It is essential to inspect each tree and to document all hazardous tree work, both surveys and removals. Some districts have numbered and tagged the trees in high use recreational sites in order to track individual trees. Records are needed both for changes in personnel and in cases of legal actions.

4. Implement a vegetation management program. In addition to hazard tree removal, the district may wish to implement a vegetation management program, particularly at Blue Point Campground. Such a program should include a pest survey, particularly with respect to the oak diseases present.

Fungal fruiting bodies collected July 29 at Oak Flat were submitted to James Allison for identification. To date, two have tentatively been identified as Inonotus dryadeus which causes a root rot in oaks and I. andersonii which causes heart rot and canker rot.

If I can be of further assistance, please call me at (714) 383-5588. Questions concerning oak diseases should be addressed to James Allison at (415) 705-2565. James Allison will send you a copy of Willis Wagoner's report, "Judging hazard from native trees in California recreation areas," PSW-P1 (1963).

Sincerely,

Laura D Merrill

Laura D. Merrill, Entomologist  
Forest Pest Management  
Southern California Shared Service Area

cc: Terry Martin Austin, Res/Rec Tech., Ojai Ranger District  
Charlie Robinson, Rec. Officer, ORD  
Al Hess, Lands and Minerals/ Resource Officer, ORD  
Dave Schreiner, TMO, LPNF